

## 2. **Victory Over Ai** (8:1-35)

“When Joshua received divine assurance of success, he chose 30,000 men (v. 3) and sent them away (v. 9). In vv. 10, 11, Joshua begins a detailed account. He reviewed the troops, and as they approached Ai, he separated 5,000 to go into ambush. In other words, v. 9 is a general summary statement of the execution of the command, the details of which begin in v. 10.” [Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 176]

“How much of our misery arises from fear! How many a beating heart, how many a shaking nerve, how many a sleepless night have come, not from evil experienced, but from evil apprehended! To save one from the apprehension of evil is sometimes more important, as it is usually far more difficult, than to save one from evil itself. An affectionate father finds that one of his most needed services to his children is to allay their fears. Never is he doing them a greater kindness than when he uses his larger experience of life to assure them, in some anxiety, that there is no cause for fear. Our heavenly Father finds much occasion for a similar course. He has indeed got a very timid family. It is most interesting to mark how the Bible is studded with ‘fear nots’ from Genesis to Revelation; from that early word to Abraham — ‘Fear not, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward’ — to that most comforting assurance to the beloved disciple, ‘Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hades and of death.’ If only God’s children could hear Him uttering that one word, from how much anxiety and misery would it set them free!” [Blaikie, p. 680]

### a. **A New Beginning** (8:1-2)

“Virtually the command to Joshua is to ‘try again.’... ‘Let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap if we faint not.’” [Blaikie, p. 680]

“It was of great consequence to Joshua, as well as the people, to inspire new courage, that they might prepare with confidence to assault the city of Ai, from which they had lately been repulsed with loss and greater disgrace. God, therefore, to inspire them with intrepidity on this expedition, promises that he will give them the cry. With the same view he enjoins them to fight by stratagem more than open war, to entice the enemy out, and to select a secret place for an ambuscade which might take them by surprise. A few thousands might without any difficulty have been overthrown by an immense host attacking the city suddenly and unexpectedly. But as we formerly saw that the hearts of all had melted away, God consulted for their weakness by laying no greater burden upon them than they were able to bear, until they had recovered from their excessive panic, and could execute his commands with alacrity.

“It is true, indeed, that he now used their own exertion, partly that they might not always keep looking for miracles, and so give themselves up to laziness, and partly that in different and unequal modes of acting they might nevertheless recognize that his power is the same. But care must be taken not to omit the special reason, namely, that not having yet recovered from their terror, they could scarcely have been induced to engage in an open conflict, had they not seen stratagem employed as a subsidiary aid. The first place, however, is due to the promise, Fear not, for I have delivered it into thy hands: for although it is verbally directed to Joshua, it belongs in common to the whole people, as it was most necessary that all to a man should be freed from anxiety and furnished with new confidence.” [Calvin’s *Commentaries* IV, p. 122]

### i. **A Word of Encouragement** (8:1a)

“Most people see failure as a disaster to be avoided at all costs. But failure doesn’t have to be the end, sometimes it can be the means to a very successful end. Thomas Edison said, ‘I failed my way to success.’ Ken Olan is a motivational speaker who has given a new twist to the word ‘fail.’ He uses it as an acrostic for Final Attempt In Life. Failure occurs if we give up and quit. Citing a Harvard Business School study, Olan described how important a don’t-quit attitude is for the equation of

success. Harvard noted there are three aspects of success that can be best understood by drawing a triangle. The left side is knowledge, the right leg is skill, and the foundation on which these two rest is Attitude. That's because, as their research indicated, your attitude carries 93 percent of the weight in determining whether or not you succeed or fail. Maybe that's why Thomas Edison ended up inventing the light bulb. When asked about his numerous failed attempts with the light bulb, Edison remarked, 'I never failed once. I invented the light bulb. It just happened to be a two thousand-step process.'" [Ken Olan, Houston, Texas, Fall 1997; *Better Families*, Oct. 1997, p. 1; *A 2nd Helping of Chicken Soup for the Soul*, Jack Canfield and Mark Hansen, 1995, p. 253 in *McHenry's Stories for the Soul* compiled by Raymond McHenry, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001), p. 100]

"One of the rich Christmas traditions is watching the classic movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*. Some people can't celebrate Christmas without watching it at least once during the holiday season. Each year consumers buy six hundred thousand copies of it on video. But you would have never thought this would be possible when it opened on December 20, 1946. Frank Capra's classic was a box-office flop. It cost \$3,180,000 to make and lost \$480,000 (a sizable figure back then). It didn't win a single Oscar. The film...seemed destined to become nothing more than a financial disaster. But the failure of fifty years ago is now a monumental success. When failure seems to scare you, take a minute to think about the movie and the message of this Christmas classic" [*U.S. News & World Report*, Dec. 23, 1996, p. 18; *Saturday Evening Post*, July/Aug. 1997, p. 32 in *McHenry's Stories for the Soul*, p. 100-101]

"In *Famous Black Quotations For Teens*, [Michael] Jordan writes, 'I've missed more than nine thousand shots in my career. I've lost almost three hundred games. Twenty-six times I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.'" [*Houston Chronicle*, Dec. 23, 1999, p. 6 in *McHenry's Stories for the Soul*, p. 101]

"It's not whether you get knocked down, it's whether you get up." [Vince Lombardi in *Don's Forget to Sing in the Lifeboats*, p. 209]

"You have to realize that success is built on disappointment, and disappointment is inherent in all success." [Bette Davis in Charlotte Chandler, *The Girl Who Walked Home Alone: Bette Davis: A Personal Biography*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), p. 55]

"Never confuse a single defeat with a final defeat." [F. Scott Fitzgerald in *Don't Forget to Sing in the Lifeboats*, p. 242]

"God is as able to lift me up as to cast me down. If disobedience brings defeat, as certainly will obedience bring the victory. Obedience is the philosopher's stone that will transmute all my life to gold." [Wells, *The Living Bible*, p. 61]

#### ii. A Word of Instruction (8:1b-2)

"...*Fear not, neither be thou dismayed*, v. 1. This intimates that the sin of Achan, and the consequences of it, had been a very great discouragement to Joshua, and made his heart almost ready to fail... Treacherous Israelites are to be dreaded more than malicious Canaanites.... He assures him of success against Ai, tells him it is all his own; but he must take it as god's gift." [*Matthew Henry's Commentary II*, p. 35]

"He who has once burnt his mouth always blows his soup." [German proverb in *You Can Say That Again: An Anthology of Words Fitly Spoken* compiled and Arranged by R. E. O. White, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), p. 90]

"On the night of July 10-11, 1943, a vast armada of 3,000 ships containing 80,000 Allied soldiers sailed across the waters from Malta to the shores of Sicily in a great amphibious operation. General Eisenhower, surrounded by his staff officers, stood on a high hill overlooking Malta harbor. In the light of a full moon shining down on the sea he watched the troop-laden ships weigh anchor and sail out into the mists while squadrons of planes roared into the sky. Deeply moved, Eisenhower sprang to attention and saluted his heroic men. Then he bowed his head in silent prayer — his staff joining him in this brief act of devotion. Turning to an officer beside him, Eisenhower said: 'There comes a time when you've used your brains, your training, your technical skill, and the die is cast and the

events are in the hands of God, and there you have to leave them.” [John Sutherland Bonnell quoted in *Christian Clippings*, (January 1978), p. 14-15]

“The direction he gives him in attacking Ai. It must not be such a work of time as the taking of Jericho was; this would have prolonged the war too much. Those that had patiently waited seven days for Jericho shall have Ai given them in one day. Nor was it, as that, to be taken by miracle, and purely by the act of God, but now their own conduct and courage must be exercised; having seen God work for them, they must now bestir themselves.” [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary II*, p. 35]

“He allows the people to take the spoil to themselves. Here the spoil was not consecrated to God as that of Jericho, and therefore there was no danger of the people’s committing such a trespass as they had committed there. Observe, How Achan who caught at forbidden spoil lost that, and life, and all, but the rest of the people who had conscientiously refrained from the accursed thing were quickly recompensed for their obedience with the spoil of Ai.... No man shall lose by his self-denial...” [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary II*, p. 35]

**b. A New Strategy (8:3-13)**

“We have here an account of the taking of Ai by stratagem. The stratagem here used, we are sure, was lawful and good; God himself appointed it, and we have no reason to think but that the like is lawful and good in other wars. Here was no league broken, no treaty of peace, that the advantage was gained; no, these are sacred things, and not to be jested with, nor used to serve a turn; truth, when once it is plighted, becomes a debt even to the enemy. But in this stratagem here was no untruth told; nothing was concealed but their own counsels, which no enemy ever pretended a right to be entrusted with; nothing was dissembled, nothing counterfeited but a retreat, which was no natural or necessary indication at all of their inability to maintain their onset, or of any design not to renew it. The enemy ought to have been upon their guard, and to have kept within the defense of their own walls. Common prudence, had they been governed by it, would have directed them not to venture on the pursuit of an army which they saw was so far superior to them in numbers, and leave their city unguarded; but... if the Canaanites will be so easily imposed upon, and in pursuit of God’s Israel will break through all the laws of policy and good management, the Israelites are not at all to be blamed for taking advantage of their fury and thoughtlessness....

“A detachment being secretly marched behind the city, on the other side to that on which the main body of the army lay..., Joshua, and the forces with him, faced the city; the garrison made a vigorous sally out upon them, whereupon they withdrew, gave ground, and retreated in some seeming disorder towards the wilderness, which being perceived by the men of Ai, they drew out all the force they had to pursue them. This gave a fair opportunity for those that lay in ambush to make themselves masters of the city, whereof when they had given notice by a smoke to Joshua, he, with all his force, returned upon the pursuers, who now, when it was too late, were aware of the snare they were drawn into, and, their retreat being intercepted, they were every man of them cut off....

“See,...(1) His care and industry (v. 10): *He rose up early in the morning*, that he might lose no time, and to show how intent his mind was upon his business. Those that would maintain their spiritual conflicts must not love their ease. (2).... His courage and resolution; though an army of Israelites had been repulsed before Ai, yet he resolves to lead them on in person the second time, v. 5.... What an obedient people Israel was. What *Joshua commanded them to do, according to the commandment of the Lord* (v. 8), they did it without murmuring or disputing.” [*Matthew Henry’s Commentary II*, p. 36]

“The *ruse* was that the ambush should be concealed behind the city; that Ai, as before, should be attacked from the east by the main body of troops; that on receiving the onslaught from the city they should seem to be defeated as before; that Joshua, probably standing on some commanding height, should give a signal to the men in ambush by raising his spear; whereupon these men should rush down on the now deserted place and set it on fire. On seeing the flames,

the pursuers would naturally turn and rush back to extinguish them; then the main body of Israel would turn likewise, and thus the enemy would be caught as in a trap from which there was no escape, and fall a victim to the two sections of Israel.

“To plots of this kind, the main objection in a strategical sense lies in the risk of detection. For the five thousand who went to station themselves in the west it was a somewhat perilous thing to separate themselves from the host, and place themselves in the heart of enemies both in front and in rear. It needed strong faith to expose themselves in such a situation. Suppose they had been detected as they went stealing along past Ai in the darkness of the night; suppose they had come on some house or hamlet, and wakened the people, so that the alarm should have been carried to Ai, what would have been the result? It was well for Israel that no such mishap occurred, and that they were able in silence to reach a place where they might lie concealed. The ground is so broken by rocks and ravines that this would not have been very difficult; the people of Ai suspected nothing... The plot was entirely successful; everything fell out precisely as Joshua had desired.” [Blaikie, p. 681]

**c. A New Victory (8:14-29)**

“What a complete victory Israel obtained over them by the favor and blessing of God. Each did his part: the divided forces of Israel, by signals agreed on, understood one another, and every thing succeeded according to the project; so that the men of Ai, even when they were most confident of victory, found themselves surrounded, so that they had neither spirit to resist nor room to fly, but were under a fatal necessity of yielding their lives to the destroyers.... See how easily, how quickly, the scale turns against those that have not God on their side.” [Matthew Henry's Commentary II, p. 37]

“One lesson comes to its with pre-eminent force from the operations of war. The activity displayed by every good commander is a splendid example for all of us in spiritual warfare. ‘Joshua arose’; ‘Joshua lodged that night among the people’; ‘Joshua rose up early in the morning’; ‘Joshua went that night into the middle of the valley’; ‘Joshua drew not his hand back wherewith he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai.’ Such expressions show how intensely in earnest he was, how unsparing of himself, how vigilant and indefatigable in all that bore upon his enterprise.” [Blaikie, p. 682]

**i. Ai Emptied (8:14-17)**

“By pretending flight they draw off the enemy to a distance, leaving them no retreat afterwards into the city, which was in flames before they suspected that any disaster was to be apprehended in their rear. Hence, while the king of Ai pursues the Israelites as vanquished, the part of the army which lay hid towards Bethel had sufficient time to take the city, and make it too late for the inhabitants to perceive that they were utterly undone....

“The question here asked by some, as to whether it is lawful to overcome an enemy by wiles and stratagem, originates in gross ignorance. First, it is certain that wars are carried on not merely by striking blows; for those are considered the best commanders who accomplish more by art and counsel than by mere violence; and secondly, the longer any one has served so as to acquire experience, the better soldier he makes. If war, then, is lawful, it is beyond all controversy that the usual methods of conquering may be lawfully employed, provided always that there be no violation of faith once pledged either by truce or in any other way.” [Calvin's Commentaries IV, p. 124-125]

“If war is lawful, stratagem is lawful.... In the ordinary run of strategic movements, you are under no obligation to tell the foe what you are about. It is part of their business to watch you, to scrutinize your every movement, and in spite of appearances to divine your real purpose. If they are too careless to watch, or too stupid to discern between a professed and a real plan, they must bear the consequences. But when a flag of truce is displayed, when a meeting takes place under its protection, and when conditions are agreed to on both sides, the case is very different. The enemy is entitled now to expect that you will not mislead them. Your word of honors has been passed to that effect. And to disregard that pledge, and deem it smart to mislead thereby, is a proceeding worthy only of the most barbarous, the most perfidious, the most shameless of men.

“Thus far we may defend the usages of war; but at best it is a barbarous mode of operation. Very memorable was the observation of the Duke of Wellington, that next to the calamity of suffering a defeat was that of gaining a victory. To look over a great battlefield, fresh from the clash of arms; to survey the trampled Crops, the ruined houses, the universal desolation; to gaze on all the manly forms lying cold in death, and the many besides wounded, bleeding, groaning, perhaps dying; to think of the illimitable treasure that has been lavished on this work of destruction and the comforts of which it has robbed the countries engaged; to remember in what a multitude of cases, death must carry desolation and anguish to the poor widow, and turn the remainder of life into a lonely pilgrimage, is enough surely to rob war of the glory associated with it, and to make good the potation that on the part of civilized and Christian men it should only be the last desperate resort, after every other means of effecting its object has failed. We are not forgetful of the manly self-sacrifice of those who expose themselves so readily to the risk of mutilation and death, wherever the rulers of their country require it, for it is the redeeming feature of war that it brings out so much of this high patriotic devotion; but surely they are right who deem arbitration the better method of settling national differences; who call for a great disarmament of the European nations, and would put a stop to the attitude of every great country shaking its fist in the face of its neighbors. What has become of the prophecy ‘ They shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks?’” [Blaikie, p. 681-682]

ii. **Ai Captured** (8:18-20)

“God, the righteous Judge, had passed this sentence upon them for their wickedness, so that the Israelites were only the ministers of his justice and the executioners of his doom. Once in this story, and but once, mention is made of the men of Beth-el, as confederates with the men of Ai, v. 17. Though they had a king of their own, and were not subjects to the king of Ai (for the king of Bethel is reckoned among the thirty-one kings that Joshua destroyed, Joshua 12:16), yet Ai being a stronger place they threw themselves into that, for their own safety, and the strengthening of their neighbors' hands, and so (we may presume) were all cut off with them; thus that by which they hoped to prevent their own ruin hastened it.” [Matthew Henry's Commentary II, p. 37]

iii. **Ai Destroyed** (8:21-29)

“With reference to the spoil of the city, the rigid law prescribed at Jericho was not repeated; the people got it for themselves. Jericho was an exceptional case; it was the firstfruits of the conquest, therefore holy to the Lord. If Achan had but waited a little, he would have had his share of the spoil of Ai or some other place. He would have got legitimately what he purloined unlawfully.... It is not God's method to muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And so to all who rush tumultuously upon the good things of this life;, He says, ‘Seek first the kingdom of heaven and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you.’ Let God arrange the order in which His gifts are distributed.” [Blaikie, p. 681]

“They plundered the city and took all the spoil to themselves, v. 27. Thus the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just...” [Matthew Henry's Commentary II, p. 37]

“They laid the city in ashes, and left it to remain so, v. 28.” [Matthew Henry's Commentary II, p. 38]

d. **A New Commitment** (8:30-35)

“This religious solemnity of which we have here an account comes in somewhat surprisingly in the midst of the history of the wars of Canaan. After the taking of Jericho and Ai, we should have expected that the next news would be of their taking possession of the country, the pushing on of their victories in other cities, and the carrying of the war into the bowels of the nation, now that they had made themselves masters of these frontier towns. But here a scene opens of quite another nature; the camp of Israel is drawn out into the field, not to engage the enemy, but to offer sacrifice, to hear the law read, and to say *Amen* to the blessings and the curses.” [Matthew Henry's Commentary II, p. 38]

“When...Joshua conducted his people to the Mounts Ebal and Gerizim, in order that they might have the obligations of the law set before them in a form as impressive as it was

picturesque, he was not merely fulfilling mechanically an injunction of Moses, but performing a transaction into which he himself entered heart and soul. And when the writer of the book records the transaction, it is not merely for the purpose of showing us how certain acts prescribed in a previous book were actually performed, but for the purpose of perpetuating an occurrence which in the whole future history of the nation would prove either a continual inspiration for good, or a testimony against them, so that out of their own life they should be condemned." [Blaikie, p. 683-684]

"...All the business of the war shall stand still, while they make a long march to the place appointed, and there attend this solemnity." [*Matthew Henry's Commentary* II, p. 38]

"After their victories at Jericho and Ai, an observer might have expected the Jewish troops to proceed immediately with the conquest of the country by moving south along the mountain road to attack the most heavily fortified cities of that region. This is what the people did do eventually, though not at once. Instead, the observer would have seen them take a detour of about twenty-five miles north and a few miles west, to a valley situated between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim.... F. B. Meyer describes it as a place where the mountains are hollowed out 'and the limestone stratum is broken into a succession of ledges "so as to present the appearance of a series of regular benches.'" It is 'a natural amphitheater capable of containing a vast audience of people.'..

"One feature of the place between the mountains is its fine acoustical properties. A person on one mountain can easily hear a person on the other, and both can clearly hear what goes on below. One former visitor to Palestine, Canon Tristram, told of putting two of his traveling companions on the sides of the opposing mountains and having them recite the Ten Commandments antiphonally. Each could hear the other perfectly.

"This is what the Jewish people did at Ebal and Gerizim... They did it in precise obedience to the earlier commands of Moses....(Deut. 27:12-13). The Levites were to read the curses.... After each of the twelve curses...the people were to say, 'Amen.'

"Then the blessings were to be read....

"This is what Joshua enacted on the slopes of these mountains." [Boice, p. 65-67]

"In this connection there comes into focus the two-stage nature of Yahweh's ceremonial renewal of his covenant with Israel. The ceremony insuring Ashurbanipal's throne rights was held, as it turned out, just four years before the elderly Esarhaddon's death. Then, as was customary, soon after the accession of Ashurbanipal there was another ceremony for the confirming of the vassal's fealty to him. Such, we take it, is the relationship of the covenant ceremony conducted by Moses in Moab and documented by the Book of Deuteronomy to the covenant ceremony conducted by Joshua at Mounts Ebal and Gerizim and reported in Joshua 8:30-35. The first stage takes place when the death of Moses, the Lord's representative, is imminent. Yahweh's continuing lordship is reaffirmed in a ceremony in which his appointment of Joshua to be Moses' successor as his vicegerent is announced (31:3) and Joshua is divinely commissioned (31:14, 23; cf. 31:7ff.). Accordingly Israel's renewed oath of obedience embraces a commitment to follow Joshua (cf. 34:9; Josh. 1:16-18), that is, to submit to Yahweh's expressed will regarding the dynastic succession. The second stage of the ceremony was held at Shechem not long after Moses' death and Joshua's accession, when the Lord had attested his presence with Joshua as with Moses by duplicating the Mosaic signs of victory over the waters and hostile hosts. There Israel was summoned to confirm its consecration to the Lord according to all the words in the Mosaic book of the law and hence to confirm its recognition of Joshua as representative of God's appointment in succession to Moses.

"Far from being appendant fragments worked in by an editorial eclectic, the dynastic succession material in Deuteronomy 31-34 treats of that which was the very occasion for the covenant renewal and thus for the whole Book of Deuteronomy. Joshua's succession was the most prominent symbol of Yahweh's continuing theocratic lordship and therefore it was of fundamental and supreme significance in the covenant ceremony and document. By the same token, the Shechem ceremony, as the cultic confirmation of Joshua's succession, emerges as the

climactic act in the process of covenant renewal.” [Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy: Studies and Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1963), p. 36-37]

**i. An Altar Built (8:30-31)**

“They built an altar, and offered sacrifice to God (v. 30, 31), in token of their dedication of themselves to God, as living sacrifices to his honor, in and by a Mediator, who is the altar that sanctifies this gift. This altar was erected on Mount *Ebal*, the mount on which the curse was put (Deuteronomy 11:29), to signify that there, where by the law we had reason to expect a curse, by Christ's sacrifice of himself for us and his mediation we have peace with God; he has redeemed us from the curse of the law by being made a *curse for us*, Galatians 3:13.” [Matthew Henry's *Commentary II*, p. 38]

“God had been pleased that this should be the first extraordinary sacrifice offered to him in the land of Canaan, that thus the people might attest their gratitude, and the land begin to be consecrated in regular form.” [Calvin's *Commentaries IV*, p. 131]

“To begin with the altar, — it is said, that according to the divine command, it was formed of unhewn stones. For entire stones on which the masons' iron has not been employed, are called rough and unworked. This is specially said in Deuteronomy 27, of the altar, of which mention is now made. But the same thing had before been said in general of all others.” [Calvin's *Commentaries IV*, p. 132]

“This is an absolutely fabulous thing, for at least three reasons.

“First, on this great occasion when the law of Moses was so forcefully and visibly held before the people (both by the writing on stone and by the reciting of the Law by the Levites and the response of the people to the Levites' reading), that altar was also constructed as the solution to the problem of those who should hear the law but who had not kept it. That is to say, it was God's solution to the sin problem. This is what God had been teaching all along. When God first gave the Law on Sinai, he gave at the same time the regulations regarding sacrifices. When he gave Moses as lawgiver, at the same time he gave Aaron to be the high priest....

“Sin brings judgment. The judgment of sin is death. But the sacrifices show that it is possible for an innocent victim to die in the place of the sinner. In those ancient days, the victim was an animal. But the animal pointed forward to the only truly sufficient sacrifice, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It is by faith in his death for us that we escape sin's punishment.

“Second, when the altar was constructed by Joshua in obedience to the commands of Moses, it was not constructed in the valley between the two mountains, or on Mount Gerizim, but on Mount Ebal. Why...? ...Ebal was the mountain from which the curses were to be read, while Gerizim was the mountain from which the blessings on the upright were declared. In other words, the altar was for sinners. It was for those who acknowledged their sin and who came, not as the righteous, but as sinners to the place of sacrifice....

“Finally, the altar constructed on Mount Ebal was to be of natural stones with no human workmanship added to them.... It is a denial of the thought that human beings can add anything at all to salvation.... Salvation is by grace through the work of God alone.” [Boice, p. 69-70]

**ii. The Law Reaffirmed (8:32-35)**

“It is agreed among most students of the Old Testament that the heart of the Old Testament law is Deuteronomy and that the heart of Deuteronomy is the list of blessings and curses found in Deuteronomy 27-30... On the one hand there is a list of curses for those who disobey God's law (Deut. 27-28). On the other hand, there is a list of blessings for those who adhere to it (Deut. 28)... Moses says, ‘This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him’ (Deut. 30:19-20).” [Boice, p. 64-65]

“A different rule is applicable to the stones here mentioned, on which God wished that a memorial of his Law should always appear, in order that, a kind of barrier might be interposed to

protect the pure religion against the superstitions of Egypt. They were therefore covered with lime, that they might be more conspicuous, and the writing upon them more distinct.... This made it palpable even to strangers entering the land what God was worshipped in it, and all excuse for error was taken away, when the Law was not treasured up in a book, but made manifest to the eyes of all. In short, though the priests should have been dumb, the stones themselves spoke clearly.” [Calvin’s Commentaries IV, p. 133]

“They received the law from God; and this those must do that would find favor with him, and expect to have their offerings accepted; for, if we turn away our ear from hearing the law, our prayers will be an abomination. When God took Israel into covenant he gave them his law, and they, in token of their consent to the covenant, subjected themselves to the law.... The law of the ten commandments was written upon stones in the presence of all Israel, as an abridgment of the whole, v. 32. This copy was not graven in the stone, as that which was reserved in the ark: That was to be done only by the finger of God; it is his prerogative to write the law in the heart. But the stones were plastered, and it was written upon the plaster, Deuteronomy 27:4, 8. It was written, that all might see what it was that they consented to, and that it might be a standing remaining testimony to posterity of God’s goodness in giving them such good laws, and a testimony against them if they were disobedient to them....

“The blessings and the curses, the sanctions of the law, were publicly read, and the people (we may suppose), according to Moses’s appointment, said *Amen* to them, v. 33, 34.... The tribes were posted, as Moses directed, six towards Gerizim and six towards Ebal. And the ark in the midst of the valley was between them, for it was the *ark of the covenant*; and in it were shut up the close rolls of that law which was copied out and shown openly upon the stones.” [Matthew Henry’s Commentary II, p. 39]